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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-2107
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The Honorable George W. Bush
President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20050

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to express my concern about your Administration's policy regarding Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons in light of recent press reports of a meeting between U.S. and Iranian officials and of Iranian efforts to develop a full nuclear fuel cycle which includes mining domestic uranium ores.

As you know, last fall, the United States Congress and the United Nations Security Council passed resolutions condemning Iraq and requiring anytime, anywhere inspections of all suspected weapons sites in that country. Your Administration has made a comprehensive case to the UN that Iraq is continuing to obstruct the inspectors efforts and conceal its weapons of mass destruction programs and that action by the international community is needed to address Iraq's material breaches of UN resolution 1441 and other relevant UN resolutions providing for dismantlement of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs.

At the same time, U.S. nonproliferation efforts elsewhere around the world appear to be adrift.

For example, when confronted by the U.S., the government of North Korea admitted to the existence of a secret uranium enrichment facility, in violation of North Korea's commitments under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and other international agreements. North Korea subsequently announced its withdrawal from the NPT, expelled the IAEA inspectors who were monitoring the spent fuel from its research reactor, removed that fuel from the reactor site for possible reprocessing, and threatened military action if the international community imposed sanctions. In marked contrast to the situation in Iraq, however, your Administration has failed to articulate a coherent policy response to the threat posed by a nuclear-armed North Korea, or to mobilize the international community to take action. Indeed, your Administration has not even formally reversed your previous support for the transfer of two light water reactors to North Korea, a failure that leads some to conclude that a revival of this ill-considered deal is still a viable part of an eventual solution to the current crisis.

Similarly, despite substantial evidence that Iran is also pursuing a nuclear weapons capability, your Administration appears to have done little or nothing in response.

On December 16, 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell said "We've always found it curious as to why Iran would need nuclear power, when they are so blessed with other means of generating electricity. And thereby, that leads to the possibility of proliferation." As you know, Iran sits on almost one-tenth of the world's oil reserves and one-fifth of the world's natural gas reserves, yet is in the process of building up to six nuclear reactors with Russian assistance. These reactors are ostensibly being built to generate electricity, but given the size of Iran's oil and natural gas reserves, the purpose of these reactors can only be to gain experience working with nuclear materials and to obtain sufficient plutonium or highly enriched uranium to build nuclear bombs.

The problem is not that you have raised these concerns – the problem is that you raise them in blithe disregard of our own parallel policy in North Korea. Your Administration's decision to support the transfer of nuclear reactors to North Korea severely undermined the credibility of U.S. opposition to similar assistance in Iran. It allowed Russian President Putin to rebuff U.S. concerns, as he did at the joint press conference you held with him in Moscow on May 25, 2002, when he stated:

"...I'd like to point out that cooperation between Iran and Russia is not all a character which would undermine the process on non-proliferation. Our cooperation is exclusively, as regards energy sector, focused on the problems of economic nature. I'd like to point out also that the U.S. has taken a commitment upon themselves to build similar nuclear power plant in North Korea, similar to Russia."

Satellite photographs are available on the World Wide Web (<http://www.isis-online.org/publications/iran/iranimages.html>) that show the construction of what analysts believe to be uranium enrichment plants at Arak. In addition, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami announced yesterday that Iran has started to mine uranium for use in its nuclear program. This announcement suggests that even if Russia is successful in negotiating a nonproliferation agreement with Iran providing for the return of spent fuel from any Russian-built or designed nuclear reactors, Iran could easily circumvent such an agreement by utilizing indigenously mined and enriched uranium. The fact that Iran has apparently decided to acquire a full nuclear fuel cycle should be raising very serious concerns.

In the State of the Union Address, you said, "In Iran, we continue to see a government that ... pursues weapons of mass destruction. ... Iranians ... have a right to choose their own government and determine their own destiny—and the United States supports their aspirations to live in freedom." Is it realistic to rely upon the Iranian political process to address the threat posed by Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear explosives? A passive U.S. reaction to Iran's attempts to build nuclear bombs is not sufficient.

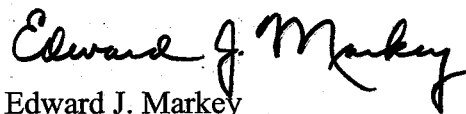
The Washington Post reported last weekend that the U.S. has begun meeting with the Iranians to seek their cooperation in the event of any future military action against Iraq. Such reports raise the question of whether the U.S. intends to continue to press actively for a halt to the Iranian nuclear program or whether we will turn a blind eye to this program in the interest of maximizing Iranian cooperation in the event of a war in Iraq. While I understand the desire to obtain Iranian cooperation in taking in any refugees from an Iraq war or assisting in the recovery

of any downed U.S. pilots, I am concerned about the fact that Iran's Bushehr nuclear reactor is supposed to begin operating by the end of this year, and that Iran appears bent on developing a full nuclear fuel cycle to support this and other reactors. We know from the history of Iraqi, Pakistani, Indian and North Korean nuclear weapons programs that covert nuclear weapons programs have often operated under the cloak of a civilian nuclear power program. Such covert programs have benefited from the technology and expertise acquired in a safeguarded reactor program.

We simply do not have the luxury of putting Iran's nuclear plans on a policy backburner. It would be particularly ironic if, in our pursuit of Saddam Hussein, we were seen to acquiesce in the birth of two additional nuclear weapons states. The U.S. should demand that Russia cease construction of the light water reactors at Bushehr and make it crystal clear that we will never allow North Korea to acquire such technology from us or from our South Korean or Japanese allies. The U.S. also should demand that Iran cease construction of the uranium enrichment plants at Arak.

If the Iranian nuclear efforts are not halted now, the world will soon face another North Korea, another unstable regime armed with nuclear weapons. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty will run the risk of becoming a dead letter, as more and more countries decide that the benefits of going nuclear outweigh the costs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edward J. Markey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Edward" and last name "Markey" clearly legible.

Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress